

SFU Press Releases Collection

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Scientists at SFU register on health research radar

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Simon Fraser University scientists are registering a significant reading on the research radar of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). In six short years, since the federal government's creation of CIHR to fund health-related research nationally at universities and teaching hospitals, SFU has gone from being a fledgling player to being a significant grant recipient. In the latest CIHR operating grant competition, SFU's four grantees were among the highest scorers, and SFU achieved one of the highest success rates in this competition. SFU's was 36.4 per cent. The national average was 28.4 per cent. There were 479 grant recipients nationally. The SFU recipients are Nicholas Harden, an associate professor in SFU's department of molecular biology and biochemistry (MBB); Michel Leroux, an assistant professor in the same department; Dipankar Sen, a professor in MBB and chemistry, and Scott Lear, an assistant professor of kinesiology. They are the principal investigators in their CIHR funded research.

Hedy Fry, Member of Parliament for Vancouver Centre will be at SFU on Tuesday, March 15 at 10:00 a.m., Halpern Centre, room 126, to formally announce the B.C. results of the recent CIHR operating grants competition. SFU President Michael Stevenson and VP-Research Mario Pinto will host an event, which will involve a presentation by Lear and tours of Sen's and Harden's labs. Leroux is receiving \$195,488 over two years to continue his investigation of the link between cilia function and obesity. The cilium is a small finger-like projection found on the surface of most cells/tissues. Its malfunction has been linked to several disorders including obesity.

A three-year grant worth \$313,404 will enable Sen to further probe the potential health benefits of designer DNA. Sen is one of only a handful of biochemists worldwide investigating how deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) molecules can be manipulated to design synthetic enzymes that are more efficient than naturally occurring ones. A \$62,566 grant over two years will enable Lear to fine-tune his exploration of how excess body fat and its distribution can signal the onset of plaque build up in arteries. Lear's research is aimed at improving medical understanding of how obesity-related heart problems and risks vary between different ethnic groups.

Leroux, Sen and Lear live in Vancouver.

Harden, a Coquitlam resident, will use his three-year grant of \$278,817 to continue investigating how genetically engineered Rho proteins affect cell signaling and growth in fruit flies. Harden's research could lead to more targeted treatment of cancerous cells, than chemotherapy and radiation.